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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS (EMERY);
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DEPARTMENT FOR H (RICH, CARTER)

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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [LA](#) [OREP](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: CODEL FALEOMAVAEGA IN LAOS FOR APPF MEETS LAO
LEADERS

REF: A. STATE 134470
[1](#)B. STATE 134160

Classified By: Political Officer Harvey Somers for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: U.S. House Asia Subcommittee Chairman Faleomavaega, in Vientiane to attend the 17th Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF) reviewed the U.S.-Laos bilateral relationship with the Lao Prime Minister, Acting Foreign Minister, and Deputy National Assembly Speaker. In each of his three bilateral meetings, Chairman Faleomavaega emphasized his interest in Lao efforts to clear unexploded ordnance (UXO) remaining from the Vietnam War, and indicated his intent to hold a hearing on the subject. He also expressed his hope that more Lao students will come to U.S. universities, including via U.S. scholarships. The Lao leaders spoke warmly of their desire for broader bilateral cooperation and reviewed bilateral trade and investment developments. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Congressman Eni Faleomavaega (D-American Samoa), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment of the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC), visited Vientiane January 10-15. He was accompanied by two Subcommittee staff members as well as two HFAC professional staff members. The delegation represented the United States at the 17th annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF). Twenty-nine countries attended the APPF, with major delegations from Russia, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and other ASEAN countries -- including Singapore which will host the 2010 APPF. During the visit, Chairman Faleomavaega met with senior Government of Laos (GOL) leaders to discuss the U.S.-Laos bilateral relationship.

The Prime Minister

[1](#)3. (C) During his meeting with Chairman Faleomavaega, Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh praised U.S.-Lao cooperation on counter-narcotics, avian influenza, and counter terrorism issues, as well as on finding remains of Americans still missing from the Vietnam War (MIAs). The Prime Minister stated that the Lao government appreciated the U.S. arrest in 2007 of General Vang Pao and several associates (on charges of violating arms export control legislation and the Neutrality Act). The Prime Minister lamented that bilateral economic relations are developing very slowly and asked the U.S. to consider ways to increase trade and investment. He specifically asked that Ex-Im Bank be allowed to support increased trade with Laos and requested U.S. support for Lao accession to the WTO. Chairman Faleomavaega responded that he would consult with his colleagues and the new Obama Administration about the Prime Minister's requests. He

also invited the Prime Minister to consider speaking at the East-West Center in Hawaii to increase understanding between our two countries.

The Acting Foreign Minister

14. (C) In a separate meeting, Acting Foreign Minister Phongsavath Boupma made many of the same comments as the Prime Minister, including on Ex-Im Bank, and added a request for more humanitarian assistance to communities where U.S. and Lao personnel are working to recover remains of MIAs. A/FM Phongsavath underlined GOL anticipation that access to Ex-Im Bank funding would facilitate more investment in Laos by Lao-Americans. Chairman Faleomavaega encouraged A/FM Phongsavath to visit the United States and meet with Lao-American communities.

The National Assembly Deputy

15. (C) National Assembly Deputy Speaker and Chair of this year's APPF Organizing Committee Xaysomphone Phomvihane described the National Assemblies activities and told Chairman Faleomavaega that he hopes to lead a delegation of National Assembly members on a United States visit. As in the other meetings, the atmosphere of the discussion was extremely friendly. Chairman Faleomavaega welcomed the proposed visit and stressed his support for more educational exchanges, particularly of university students.

COMMENT

16. (C) In Embassy memory, this is the first U.S. delegation to be given the opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister. All three GOL leaders expressed a very positive view of the bilateral relationship, focusing first on the traditional areas of cooperation -- MIA, counter-narcotics, and UXO -- but also interested in newer areas such as economic relations and cooperation against pandemic diseases. All viewed the bilateral exchange of Defense Attache offices, now underway (the U.S. DAO opened December 5, 2008, and the Lao DAO in Washington, D.C. is scheduled to open in February 2009) in very positive terms. The parallel comments about the importance of access to Ex-Im Bank support for investment in Laos highlighted the GOL's desire to increase bilateral trade and investment.

17. The CODEL did not have the opportunity to clear this report.

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